

Ford on pardon and Chile

Several things emerged from President Ford's press conference that may help allay some of the public concern and furor over the Nixon pardon:

- Americans are assured there was no deal or understanding between Mr. Ford and the former president — or between their staffs — and no "secret reason" for the pardon. This has been the most nagging suspicion for the country.

- It is acknowledged that Mr. Nixon's acceptance of a pardon can be construed as an admission of guilt and that the action of the House Judiciary Committee regarding impeachable offenses is "persuasive evidence" of culpability. This is not a substitute for what many would have preferred — Mr. Nixon's own admission of guilt or an indictment by the special prosecutor's office at the least. But it does counter any claim of innocence by Mr. Nixon or his partisans.

- Also on the record now is the fact that Mr. Ford recognized "a very real possibility" the president would be charged with obstructing justice and 10 other possible criminal actions — though the Jaworski office had stressed the preliminary nature of the latter.

It is doubtful Mr. Ford will have persuaded everyone that his decision on pardon at this time was a right one. But he came across as candid and sincere in arguing his act serves the interests of giving the nation a period of calm after Watergate.

We have not shared his judgment that the decision would heal the turmoil in the nation. It seems to us the judicial process could have continued — and would have without turmoil — but that the pardon itself introduced a turbulent element.

Nonetheless, we feel it is time to accept that decision without re-creation and to move forward from this point.

In this connection it is encouraging that Mr. Ford has reopened the matter of the Nixon papers and tapes. The President said his staff was working with the special prosecutor's office to "alleviate any concerns" about the availability of the tapes for use in court. This showed no disposition to renegotiate custody of the Nixon materials, as many have advocated. But, hope

House will at least delay transfer to San Clemente of those items Mr. Jaworski believes are needed for judicial proceedings.

Mr. Ford has thus cleared the air a bit — although he probably will not have entirely dissipated the public antagonism which he admits was stronger than he anticipated or stem the onrush of serious questions that have arisen in the wake of the pardon.

However, on another matter Mr. Ford can be faulted. Regrettably he did not disassociate himself from the Chilean policy of previous administrations. His open admission that the CIA helped prop up opposition news media and political parties in Chile during the Allende regime — and that he deemed this in the best interests of the United States — is bound to send shockwaves around the globe. It will fuel the fears of many nations, such as India, that Washington interferes in the internal affairs of regimes it dislikes.

To justify such interference on grounds the Communists spend a lot more money on similar activities hardly sets an admirable standard for a nation that purports to stand from democratic principles and the right of a people to elect the government it wants.

Apparently Mr. Ford does not want to undercut his Secretary of State, who was largely responsible for approving the CIA's program of covert actions in Chile. Dr. Kissinger is under mounting criticism for his role and the last thing the President presumably wants now is to see him go down.

Bowing to the criticism to a certain degree, Mr. Ford stated he would meet with congressional committees to discuss the controversial "Forty Committee" — the high-level intelligence panel headed by Dr. Kissinger — and see if changes are required in the congressional review process. This is a welcome step. (Congress obviously was misled about the U.S. involvement in Chile as it was about the bombing of Cambodia.)

But what is needed is more fundamental. There should be vigorous reassessment of American policy with respect to clandestine operations abroad.

It would appear Mr. Ford has not had time to study the implications of past CIA policy. His handling of this question disclosed his inexperience in foreign affairs. He